

COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY



Informal Consultation

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INTRODUCTION

1. This document sets out the strategic framework through which the WFP will communicate its mission, work and results in alleviating global hunger. It defines our target audiences and the core messages we wish to communicate to those audiences. It also outlines the environment in which WFP works, and the challenges presented, as these provide the context in which WFP's communications activities will be executed.
2. Different situations demand different responses, and in keeping with the goals and objectives articulated in the strategy, we will tailor our messaging and activities accordingly, utilizing the most appropriate and effective communications tools. The communications strategy will help prioritize the communications activities WFP will implement – critical given the increasing number of opportunities being presented.
3. The goals and objectives of the communications strategy are aligned and linked inextricably with WFP's proposed Strategic Plan (2008–2011).

CONTEXT

4. Hunger affects more than 850 million people across the globe and yet it remains a relatively distant concept for most of the developed world. It is not new and it is not tangible. Unless it is revealed and described through the media when disaster strikes, it may not seem urgent or life-threatening. It may not even rank among the top tier of problems with which the world must contend.
5. The recent spike in food prices affecting consumers across the globe has brought new opportunities to raise awareness of world hunger and in some cases, new challenges, as we seek to build and develop an understanding of what our work in alleviating hunger does to make the world a better place.

BACKGROUND

6. When WFP was established 45 years ago, it was as a food surplus distribution agency. Food surpluses were a problem and WFP provided a solution by transporting these surpluses to the hungry poor in the developing world. The organization had a straightforward job, and a firm commitment from donor governments to access surplus food, as long as that surplus should last. There was no competition. The job was clear: to move the grain from donor countries to the developing world.
7. In those days, the strategic objective was straightforward and there was little political need to communicate it. But those days are over and surplus food is no more. WFP has evolved into a food assistance agency that receives half its contributions in cash and hence money for

WFP's humanitarian needs are weighed and evaluated in the context of every other expenditure option open to governments.

8. Our message will include the fact that WFP is flexible and responsive and stands ready to use food aid, cash-based vouchers or other tools, depending on which is most effective.
9. While WFP and its partners have contributed to cutting the proportion of the hungry to 13 percent of the world's population, down from 37 percent in the 1960s, the raw numbers of hungry people continue to grow. So our challenge is to build and maintain food supply lines to increasing numbers of hungry poor against the backdrop of diminishing stocks, rising costs and the challenges inherent in the first Millennium Development Goal (MDG) of halving the proportion of hungry people by 2015.
10. In this new world, communications become even more critical to explain both the needs of the hungry and the value of our work in alleviating hunger and building a better future. Through its communications strategy, WFP will explain the link between the sources of funding and the role those funds play in supporting recipient countries. In this way, the strategy will ensure that all links along the chain of delivery carry a clear and transparent account of where funds are sourced, the decision-making process behind donations and how funds are ultimately used to alleviate hunger. As such, our communications strategy is an asset to donors, who may be called upon from time to time to explain their support for WFP.
11. With food prices rising across the world, WFP and all other humanitarian organizations trying to reach the world's hungry are facing a continually increasing challenge. A "new face of hunger" is emerging, particularly in the urban areas of developing countries where people no longer have the financial means to purchase the food they need even if it is available. WFP is exploring how to address this new face of hunger and how best to secure funds to address it.
12. An important part of our communications plan will be to ensure that audiences in both donor and beneficiary countries are informed about these developments and the impact they are having on WFP's work. At the same time, we will continue to convey the ways and extent to which food prices are affecting the vulnerability of the world's poorest and hungriest, and potentially increasing the numbers of hungry people.
13. We will also communicate that WFP will continue to strive to make efficiencies that allow us to keep our operating costs down so that we can maximize the number of hungry people who receive food assistance every year.

WFP'S COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLIC POLICY STRATEGY DIVISION

14. WFP has been at the forefront of work in humanitarian emergencies that included devastating floods in Mozambique, drought in southern Africa, conflict in the Darfur region of western Sudan, the Asian tsunami, the earthquake in Pakistan and the more recent floods in Bangladesh and post-election violence in Kenya. In every case, our communications team has ensured that the work of WFP, the impact on our beneficiaries and the support we have received from donors have been highlighted on television, radio, the web and in newspapers and magazines.
15. The international media have grown to rely on WFP's Communications Division and respect our management of the information flow when disasters strike. We have a reputation for providing prompt professional assistance ranging from acting as spokespersons, to providing a wealth of information and facts, to facilitating WFP project visits. Our network of strategically located public information officers are essential to conveying the critical role that food assistance plays in helping families and communities survive the impact of major disasters and in helping them to rebuild their livelihoods.
16. What few people realize is that we have earned this reputation despite investing relatively small amounts in communications in terms of budget and staffing. We have a policy of not paying for advertising in print outlets or for public service announcements carried by prominent TV stations and in cinemas. We do not employ outside agencies to produce our promotional material, which is created in-house. Our Ambassadors Against Hunger and celebrity partners give their time and images to us on a strictly *pro bono* basis.
17. Notwithstanding, the public perception of WFP often lags behind the operational reality of our field work. Our Communications Division will invest more time and energy informing our audience in donor countries and recipient countries of the latest developments and the fundamental ways in which our work has shifted from food aid to food assistance — from primarily delivering food from developed countries to developing countries to employing a more varied and nuanced set of tools aimed at breaking the cycle of hunger at its root.
18. In this context, we have to reinforce WFP's unique selling point and underline our particular strengths in responding to humanitarian needs: that food underpins health, education and other development interventions, and that WFP delivers food efficiently.
19. The Communications Division often is the public face of WFP. Every day, our staff mould and safeguard WFP's image. Traditionally, this has been through the extensive media contact and high profile coverage of WFP. More recently, much more awareness of WFP has been generated

through the public window of our internet site, www.wfp.org. This heightened profile has led to WFP – and the Communications Division in particular – being contacted even more often by the general public to: participate in conferences and public events, provide information to students and academics, and respond to queries on how individuals or groups can help address hunger.

20. The structure of the Communications Division ensures that it has a truly global reach, through staff posted in liaison offices from Washington to Tokyo, and with a strong presence in key recipient countries and regions where WFP field operations are most critical.
21. The Communications Division is an integral part of WFP at the field level and at Headquarters, where it works closely with the divisions of Government Donor Relations and Private Donor Relations, to ensure that core messages and communications activities are tightly linked and timed with WFP's resource mobilization efforts.

OUR STRATEGY

22. WFP's Communications Division is responsible for articulating WFP's Strategic Objectives to audiences in donor countries and recipient countries. We need to explain what we do and why we do it. That means not only describing our work in pursuing those objectives, but also in communicating the results of our work to our target audiences in these countries.
23. As we communicate the work and needs of WFP, we are often in a position to raise awareness of the issue of hunger in general and draw attention to the fact that it is a challenge that needs to be confronted by the world as a whole.
24. The Communications Division will communicate the role of WFP in addressing global hunger through the efficient and effective use of food assistance. At every opportunity we will explain that food lays a strong foundation for health, education and a better future for the communities we assist.
25. Our team of communication officers will explain to our target audiences how food assistance plays a key role across the spectrum of WFP responses from disaster mitigation and livelihood protection, through emergency response, to post-disaster rehabilitation and capacity-building. Our objective is to demonstrate that WFP's work involves much more than delivering a bag of rice or maize meal to the door of a hungry family.
26. Different contexts demand different responses, and we will refine our messaging accordingly. One of the goals of our strategy is to ensure that donors remain confident that their funds are being used in the most

transparent and effective way, and beneficiaries in recipient countries are receiving the highest levels of assistance most appropriate to their needs.

27. As an organization, WFP works in pursuit of five Strategic Objectives every day in dozens of countries around the world. We seek to:
- save lives and protect livelihoods in emergencies such as refugee crises, sudden onset natural disasters, or conflict situations;
 - prevent acute hunger and invest in the prevention and mitigation of disasters by supporting and building capacities of governments to cope with disasters and building resilience among communities;
 - restore and rebuild lives and livelihoods in post-conflict, post-disaster or transition situations;
 - reduce chronic hunger and undernutrition; and
 - strengthen countries' capacity to reduce hunger including hand-over strategies and local purchase.
28. On any given day, there are more opportunities to communicate our work than can be seized. The goal, then, is to prioritize according to which messages and activities best reflect the work and mission of WFP and the value we are adding to the organization, and to tailor them to the situation at hand.

WFP'S TARGET AUDIENCES – WHOM DO WE WANT TO REACH?

29. The questions that guide any communications strategy are what do we want to communicate and to whom do we want to communicate it. In response to the latter question, we have singled out three primary audiences:
- 1) **humanitarian and development partners and opinion leaders in donor countries;**
 - 2) **host governments, local authorities and beneficiaries; and**
 - 3) **the general public – as accessed primarily through the internet.**

Humanitarian, Development Partners and Opinion Leaders in Donor Countries

30. WFP is a voluntarily funded organization, with the overwhelming majority of its funds coming from 30 donor countries on four continents, including “new” donors, such as South Africa, Brazil, Argentina, India and China. Our work plays a fundamental role in building strong families, communities and nations. It is the foundation for all other development interventions. Yet that work will not continue unless people, corporations and policy-makers in donor governments continue

to value that work as they contemplate the many ways they can contribute to the world.

31. Our communications strategy, then, puts audiences in donor countries at the top of our list, with a clear priority on reaching journalists, academics, members of think tanks and others who play a role in building public support for food assistance as a means of building human potential.

Host Governments, Local Authorities and Beneficiaries

32. In 2008, WFP plans to deliver food to 73 million people in 78 different countries. We have been working so long in many of those countries that we are considered part of the public infrastructure. Yet, in some cases, the very governments who rely on WFP's support are not aware either of the many different tools we have to establish food security, nor of the many different roles that our assistance plays in laying a foundation for health, education and other development activities. As donors increasingly turn to host governments for their guidance on the kind of assistance needed, it is critical that WFP explains both our many different tools and programmes, as well as the results that are underpinned by food assistance. For example, we need to better inform officials and others in host governments as to the nutritional benefits of our food and the role that food assistance plays in building healthy bodies, helping children concentrate in school so that they acquire an education that can be a key to a better future.

The General Public as Accessed Primarily through the Internet

33. Just a few years ago, the worldwide general public was beyond our reach. Despite international television, it was prohibitively expensive to reach the public in many countries. The web has changed all that, with hundreds of thousands coming to www.wfp.org each week to read about our work, find information about rising food costs or search for jobs. Our aim is to use not only our website, but all opportunities offered by the internet to raise awareness among the general public.
34. Websites and online initiatives involving social networking sites, user-generated content and blogs have opened up an incredible field of opportunity. Web-based communications initiatives are relatively inexpensive. They are the preferred medium of engagement for the younger generation, and they offer a vehicle for online donations.
35. We also plan to take further advantage of the omnipresence of the video screen, from the smallest screen on the iPod or Blackberry, to the laptop computer or television, to the enormous multi-storey screens in New Times Square or sports stadiums.

36. Within each of our three primary audiences, WFP will identify particular subgroups to build up a profile of the specific audience that is being targeted. WFP recognizes that campaigns and messages should be adapted from country to country and context to context. Messages that are appropriate in a European country may not work in the United States, and different approaches will also be required for the message to be delivered in countries where WFP works.

COMMUNICATIONS TOOLS

37. WFP has developed a sophisticated array of communication tools to project its core and supporting messages to its target audiences. These tools enable the Communications Division to offer a clear definition of the roles and responsibilities of WFP as it grapples with its mission to address global hunger in a world where external forces are shaping the level of needs and the nature of the response.

Our toolbox

38. WFP has a wide variety of communications tools, all of which can be used to reach a certain audience at a given time:
- Professional staff who are available around the clock, responding to calls from the media, building contacts, attending conferences, liaising with humanitarian, political and media contacts, and promoting WFP's Strategic Objectives among the broadest possible audience in donor and recipient countries.
 - Media relations, including news releases (national, regional and international), spokespeople and media trips.
 - Language websites – alongside WFP's international website, www.wfp.org, we maintain ten national websites in languages ranging from Chinese to Finnish.
 - Editorial material, including features, opinion columns and letters to newspaper editors, as well as a growing engagement with new media through submission of blogs, and pursuit of other online opportunities.
 - Online resources such as *Food Force*, the world's first humanitarian computer game, now in 12 languages.
 - Publications including the *WFP Annual Report*, the Hunger Map and specialized information material.
 - Audiovisual resources including television public service announcements (PSAs) that are placed on national and international television channels on a *pro bono* basis; television footage of WFP operations that is provided to news channels as video news releases or raw footage; and e-board video messages that run on screens in public places such as airports and train stations.

- Print PSAs that are placed in national and international publications on a *pro bono* basis.
- Photographic resources that support WFP publications and websites, provide photographic images of WFP operations to news organizations and supply visual material to be used in print PSAs.
- Celebrity partnerships through which we aim to promote WFP's core values among wider audiences.
- Sports partnerships that link WFP to major teams and events that give privileged access to international sporting audiences.
- Visibility items, including flags, stickers, the Feedbag, t-shirts and other merchandise, that promote WFP's brand and image to a global audience and provide security to WFP staff in the field.
- Special events that leverage opportunities to generate maximum exposure for WFP's core messages, such as concerts, art shows, conferences, etc.
- Published policy papers, covering key aspects of WFP's work, including the *World Hunger Series* and Occasional Papers on issues such as the use of cash-based voucher schemes.
- Relationships with corporate partners play an important role in raising awareness among employees of corporations such as TNT and Unilever, as well as offering an opportunity for media coverage of special fundraising and participatory events.
- Friends of WFP Associations in the United States and Japan have consistently played an important role in supporting communications strategies.
- Trained, qualified WFP specialist staff across various sectors to act as credible sources and spokespeople.

MESSAGES – WHAT DO WE WANT TO COMMUNICATE?

39. The Communications Division will build its work around three **core messages** and a number of **submessages** that together define the fundamental aims and objectives of the WFP. These messages, guided by WFP's Strategic Plan 2008–2011, will be tailored to respond to the changing political, social and economic environment within which WFP operates. They will also be considered in light of current public policy debates.
- 1) **WFP is the world's frontline humanitarian agency for addressing urgent hunger needs.**
 - 2) **Food assistance works.**
 - 3) **WFP is innovative, cost-efficient and effective in reaching the vulnerable with food assistance.**

CORE MESSAGE 1

**WFP is the world's frontline humanitarian agency
for addressing urgent hunger needs.**

Submessages:

- i) WFP is the world's largest humanitarian organization with a deep field presence in about 80 countries.**
 - ii) WFP saves lives and protects livelihoods in emergencies.**
 - iii) WFP is the United Nations system's leader in emergency logistics and information and communication technology.**
40. Our communications strategy will seek to reinforce WFP's position as the United Nations' frontline humanitarian agency, often the first on the scene of global crises, saving lives and protecting the livelihoods of the millions of people who fall victim to natural and man-made disasters every year.
 41. The general public is often unaware that WFP is the world's largest humanitarian organization. This same general public is also largely unfamiliar with WFP as our brand awareness is still building. Thus, the message of WFP as the world's largest humanitarian agency resonates strongly with the general public, and we will seek to communicate this point where possible and relevant – not just to illustrate the size of WFP, but the breadth and scope of the work we do, as well as our deep field presence.
 42. We will promote the importance of food assistance as a fundamental building block of any emergency response. We will stress the vital role that WFP plays in providing logistical support for the humanitarian community as a whole during emergencies, highlighting WFP's expertise in setting up field-based information and communications systems to smooth communications links during times of crisis.
 43. Our strategy will also underline the diversity of approaches WFP now deploys in providing food assistance to communities in distress. Our aim will be to position WFP as a forward-looking and flexible organization that is ready to adopt the most appropriate response to needs that will vary from disaster to disaster.
 44. In communicating with host governments, local authorities and beneficiaries, WFP will seek to position itself as a first port of call for nations in times of humanitarian need, emphasizing our neutrality and impartiality and ability to deliver food and other emergency supplies rapidly and efficiently into the most dangerous and difficult political and physical environments.

45. In this effort, WFP will strengthen its resources at a local level, and where possible, employ national public information officers to produce tools tailored for the local media environment and target national decision-makers.
46. WFP will emphasize to local partners that even at the height of an emergency, we are also looking towards a transitional phase, out of disaster and into recovery and development.
47. WFP will also actively reach out to its online constituency in emergency situations through mailing lists, social networking sites and specific networks (e.g. students). In order to reinforce WFP's role as the frontline humanitarian agency for addressing urgent hunger needs, it is essential that these communications be action- and needs-oriented, rather than generic appeals. The call to action must be crystal clear in any communication.

CORE MESSAGE 2

Food assistance works.

Submessages:

- i) **Food assistance lays the groundwork for recovery.**
 - ii) **Food assistance contributes to good health. It lays the foundation for health, education and other development interventions.**
 - iii) **Food assistance helps to weave critical social safety nets like mother-and-child health and nutrition programmes and school feeding.**
 - iv) **Food assistance is the foundation for most other development interventions.**
48. Food is fundamental to life and food assistance lays the foundation for all interventions laid out in the MDGs. The target of halving the proportion of hungry people around the world is already enshrined in MDG 1 and the WFP Communications Division will continue to promote a "food first" agenda.
 49. Food is the starting point for all forms of development assistance. Hungry people cannot build infrastructure, nor can they benefit from it. Education and health interventions can only work effectively if the beneficiaries are well nourished. Food plays this role in all contexts, whether emergencies or recovery.
 50. We will communicate that WFP's food assistance programmes lay the foundation for health, education and a better future. Good nutrition has an immediate impact on the health of a community and is essential for

children if they are to reach their full physical and intellectual potential. A well-nourished child is far better equipped to cope with opportunistic infections and disease.

51. Wherever appropriate we will also communicate the important added value of nutritionally enhanced or fortified food assistance. This will be particularly important in messaging around mother-and-child health and nutrition programmes and programmes supporting vulnerable people living with HIV/AIDS or tuberculosis.
52. In communicating to all these audiences, WFP will emphasize that a healthy nation is a nation moving forwards and that nourishing a human being lays the foundation for all other development interventions. We will also emphasize the central importance of food in recovery from natural disasters and civil conflict, noting also the key role that WFP's food assistance plays in combating climate change and helping people mitigate its impact.
53. WFP will showcase its track record and intellectual expertise developed over several decades to underline the positive contribution it can make to national development plans – through school feeding programmes, nutrition advances and interventions, support for rural development through community-based programmes and skills acquisition. School feeding plays a well-recognized role in alleviating hunger. It combats the interaction between hunger, poor nutritional status and disease, which prevents children from going to school, poor families from investing in education and children from learning even if they are in school. School feeding also promotes economic development through local food purchases and support to agricultural production.
54. The Secretary-General has asked United Nations agencies to consider what they have done and can do to help beneficiaries mitigate and adapt to climate change. In almost 45 years on the front lines of hunger, WFP has made great strides in helping people to protect, develop and sustain natural resources.¹
55. WFP also works closely with governments in countries that are prone to natural disasters to improve their disaster preparedness programmes and mitigation techniques.

¹ Since it was established in 1963, WFP has devoted US\$8 billion to the environment in forest and pastureland renewal, soil conservation and sustainable agricultural production. Through these activities WFP has, for instance, contributed to planting 5 billion trees worldwide. In addition, WFP has built 27 km of flood-control dykes in the Sudan; irrigated and rehabilitated 14 km of canals, dug 32 wells and protected 380 hectares of farmland from soil erosion in Somalia; and dug 227 water wells and rehabilitated 652 water reservoirs throughout Afghanistan.

56. In communication with host governments, local authorities and beneficiaries, WFP will use its accrued expertise to demonstrate the vital role it has to play in national development, stressing its position as a partner in country-led efforts. This will be led by senior in-country WFP management, with supporting tools provided by the Communications Division.
57. WFP will underline that as a local partner of the host government, our resources are their resources, and that when we leave, solutions to hunger are transferred to those who once benefited from them.
58. WFP will communicate its role in development work to the general public largely through the means of case studies and examples. While communicating the bigger picture of the role of food assistance in building stronger nations and communities, the focus of messaging will be on building stronger individuals. Our message should be broken down into manageable information for the public, putting a name and a face and a meaningful cost (e.g. 25 cents/day, US\$50/year) to each story rather than speaking in terms of millions of individuals and billions of dollars.
59. WFP's communications to the general public on this subject will have a positive tone, underlining the improvements that can and have been achieved, in addition to highlighting unmet needs.
60. WFP will be candid about commonly raised criticisms such as creating dependence on food aid and the negative impact of drawn-out recovery projects, citing examples and where possible academic studies backing our methods. WFP will draw on the surprise value of some of its achievements, combating commonly-held misconceptions and not shying away from the often lively debates among non-experts.

CORE MESSAGE 3

WFP is innovative, cost-efficient and effective in reaching the vulnerable with food assistance.

Submessages:

- i) More than 90 percent of WFP funding goes straight to the hungry poor.**
- ii) WFP buys locally and regionally with an eye towards helping farmers.**
- iii) WFP works with United Nations partners and 2000 NGOs to ensure efficiency and effectiveness.**

61. WFP continues to have one of the lowest administrative overheads of any humanitarian agency. Our communications will emphasize the efficiency of our operations, and the value for money this represents for donors – whether they are governments, private corporations or the general public.
62. WFP is proud of its reputation as an organization that can reach hungry people wherever they are. By communicating to our target audience our operational triumphs in the face of adversity, we will promote these achievements among our target audiences.
63. In the process, we will demonstrate how WFP thinks creatively in the face of unusual challenges. Whether it is a case of clearing mines and building roads to improve transport links in Southern Sudan, or rehabilitating wagons and locomotives to move food in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, we will communicate the rationale behind this work and explain how it supports our mission to feed the hungry.
64. WFP will communicate its innovative and efficient operational methods to the general public by making those very same traits central to our communications tactics. We will strive to find new, effective and cost-efficient methods to communicate our messages in the realm of the internet. WFP will especially keep lines of communication open to the centres of innovation, universities and student groups, who would find WFP's creative solutions especially interesting.
65. There will be a particular focus on raising greater awareness about WFP's local procurement policy and the innovations in procurement that are being explored in the Purchase for Progress programme. WFP procured US\$612 million worth of food from 69 developing countries in 2007, comprising 80 percent of the cash spent on food procurement.
66. As this policy has expanded and developed, we have seen that buying food at a local level can help in providing a sustainable solution to establishing food security in the developing world. We will communicate the role that local procurement plays in the fragile but growing agricultural sector in many developing countries, providing small-scale farmers with more regular income.
67. We recognize that despite monumental changes in the way that WFP carries out its humanitarian work, stories about food dumping and market disruption still survive in the popular imagination. Our local procurement policy allows us to demonstrate the sophisticated tools WFP is increasingly using to support local farmers and markets.
68. As we communicate to target audiences, WFP will emphasize the tools we have developed to both prevent and mitigate disasters through early warning systems, assessments, mapping and market monitoring – tools

that are at the immediate disposal of our government partners and intended to support their capacity to manage disaster response in the future.

69. We will also stress the extent to which WFP has embraced the push towards *system-wide coherence* and greater cooperation with other United Nations agencies. WFP has an impressive record of working with sister United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Whenever possible our strategy will be to communicate the extent to which WFP works with agencies such as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).